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# **The value of community wellbeing for locality based practice**

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**Presentation to Local Government Association of Queensland  
(LGAQ) 2012 Community Wellbeing Symposium  
20-22 November, Brisbane**



# 6 propositions

1. Community wellbeing is a useful umbrella concept
2. Everyone benefits from public programs
3. There is an economic as well as social cost of not responding well
4. Local government is key in fostering community wellbeing
5. Good practice involves bringing together a number of perspectives and levers, including social and cultural initiatives
6. Engaging with the community around wellbeing offers an opportunity to enhance the political process

# Proposition 1:

## Community wellbeing is a useful umbrella concept

- A meta-goal- synonymous with the overall situation of people ('the good life')
- An 'umbrella' concept
- Can contain an appreciation of local complexity whilst looking for critical characteristics that can be generalised across contexts and measured
- Can combine both subjective and objective wellbeing components
- Can recognise nb of top-down and bottom up processes
- Has become a vehicle for specifying 'indicators' that can be used in planning and research
- Useful if it not a tool for reproducing disadvantage (even if unintended)

# Indicators of community wellbeing

- Proponents of community wellbeing indicators see them as *Statistical tools for translating broad community goals into clear, tangible and commonly understood outcomes and for assessing and communicating progress in achieving these goals.*
  - *Tools for democracy*
  - *Tools for evidence based policy making*
  - *Tools for reporting and evaluation*
- *Basis for new conversations about ‘community’, progress, wellbeing and sustainability*

(Waters, Wiseman and West)

# Various Indicator Models (from Greer & Kraatz 2005)

## ***Wealth & Affordability***

Average Cost of Renting  
Housing availability  
Housing Activity (Prices Trend)  
Personal Income  
Economic Stress  
Income support

## ***Safety & Public Health***

Public Health Services  
Crime Against Persons  
Crime Against Property  
Other Offences  
Perceptions of safety & crime  
Victim of crime

## ***Personal Health & Fitness***

Adult Overweight  
Adult Physical Activity  
Alcohol Consumption  
General Health Status  
Satisfaction with life  
Work-life balance

## ***Diversity & Learning***

Age Distribution  
Education Level  
Population Density  
Population Growth  
Local Arts & Cultural Activities  
Diversity

## ***Community & Governance***

Citizen engagement  
Community Governance  
Community Connectedness  
Personal Connectedness  
Community Trust  
Community Participation

## ***Environment & Infrastructure***

Parks and Gardens  
Community and Recreation  
Roads and Infrastructure  
Local Development  
Environmental Issues  
Transport

# Community Indicators Queensland

- 80 indicators under 6 domains
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- **Domain One: Healthy, safe and inclusive communities:** personal health and wellbeing, community connectedness, lifelong learning, service availability
- **Domain Two: Dynamic, resilient local economies:** economic activity, employment, income and wealth, skills and work-life balance
- **Domain Three: Sustainable built and natural environments:** housing affordability, transport accessibility, water, biodiversity
- **Domain Four: Culturally rich and vibrant communities:** arts and cultural activities, sporting and recreational activities, cultural diversity
- **Domain Five: Democratic and engaged communities:** citizen engagement
- **Domain Six: Demography:** population size and structure, population stability, diversity and family structure
- From:
- <http://www.communityindicatorsqld.org.au/content/community-indicators-queensland>

# Goals underpinning the Qld Community indicators stated as:

- The adoption of a bottom-up community led approach
- Facilitation of active citizen engagement and a democratic approach to improving wellbeing and quality of life in the community
- The provision of a tool to assist policy and program evaluation by non-economic measures
- A contribution to long term policy research for a range of social policy oriented disciplines
- A flexible framework allowing local communities to commission surveys on issues of direct local relevance
- From: <http://www.communityindicatorsqld.org.au/content/community-indicators-queensland>



# Social capital

- Attributes – social participation (networks, bonds and bridges)
- Qualities (strength) such as social trust, altruism and reciprocity
- Most sustained by businesses engaged in local capitalism, and families and associations that are part of the everyday fabric (rather than by globalised companies that move with changing opportunities)
- Communities with good social capital tend to be more ‘hired, housed, healthy and happy’ (Productivity Commission 2003)
- ‘Bonding social capital’ and ‘bridging social capital’ are both important for economic advancement, as are repeated interactions in networks which are predominantly horizontal (Wallis and Killerby 2004, Putnam 2000)

# Role of local government in ...

- Appreciating the interface between **objective indicators** and the **local context** ie what do these indicators mean here? What resources and environments are most important to enhance wellbeing for different groups now and into the future?
- **Subjective wellbeing**: Engaging diverse groups in conversations about what wellbeing (and its component elements) means to them and how it can be enhanced. Key question of who is IN 'the community'? Importance of appreciating the subjective wellbeing of those who are marginalised.
- Fostering **horizontal networks** and '**embeddedness**'- strategies which involve local people and so foster mutual trust and cooperative norms between citizens and the state (See Tolbert et al. 1998)

# Redland Youth and Public Space Survey

(Crane 2010)

- In 2009 the first survey was conducted to explore young people's experiences of public space and safety in Redland City.
- 2148 young people 12-19 accessed through 8 high schools responded from across the City. Mean age of 14.5 years slightly more females than males.
- Provides useful insight into how young people see the community and their safety needs.

# How young people think the community sees them

- More than 1 in 4 (26%) of young people consider the community is not concerned about the safety of young people.
- 43.5% of young people say that when they are out with a group of friends that the public are suspicious or scared of them
- 37.4% (generally younger) thought other people saw them as simply 'having a good time'
- When asked if they had read or heard that some people in Redlands do not feel safe due to the presence of young people 58.5% said they hear this sometimes and 14% indicated that they hear this often.
- 36% of all young people said they felt angry or frustrated by how other people thought of young people in groups

# Proposition 2:

## Everyone benefits from public programs

- Recipients and non-recipients
- Public programs indirectly benefit non-recipients in terms of:
  - Economic wellbeing
    - Increasing economic security
    - Stimulating economies (including local economies)
    - Increasing employment
    - Generating tax revenues
    - Providing cost savings
  - Enhancing neighbourhood quality
  - Intrinsic rewards from humanitarian action
- Notion of ‘positive net benefits’ (Eamon, Wu, and Zhang 2012)

# Role of local government in ...

- Prevention (fostering social capital) and early intervention
- Fostering public and community accessed spaces that are configured and managed in ways that promote wellbeing
- Activating spaces through community development and cultural projects
- Maximising access to 'soft entry points' for more specialised assistance eg Council run or supported youth centres, libraries, central shopfronts for human services











## Proposition 3:

# There is an economic as well as social cost of not responding well

- ***Lifecourse institutional costs of homelessness for vulnerable groups*** (Baldry, Dowse, McCausland and Clarence 2012)
- Lifecourse institutional costs for 11 case studies of vulnerable homeless people, currently aged between 23 and 55, ranged from around \$900,000 to \$5.5 million. Some of this is borne at the local level.
- The need for more ‘joined up’ ways of planning and intervening to enhance aspects of wellbeing

- *In almost every case discussed, significant disadvantage, vulnerability and risk factors are obvious from early adolescence and, for several individuals from childhood, yet care and protection and early intervention do not occur in any substantial or sustained way. The evidence is stark that this early lack of adequate services is associated with costly criminal justice, health and homelessness interactions and interventions later in their lives. Millions of dollars in crisis and criminal justice interventions continue to be spent on these vulnerable individuals whose needs would have been better addressed in early support or currently in a health, rehabilitation or community space (ibid p.6).*

- *The failure to adequately recognise and address the care, protection and early intervention needs of children and young people, particularly those who have multiple and compounding vulnerabilities, is shown in the case studies above to have the effect of funneling these children and young people into systems of control rather than of care (ibid p.106).*
- There is an important role for local government in contributing to prevention and early intervention through attention to community wellbeing.

# Proposition 4:

## Local government is key in fostering community wellbeing

- Has responsibility for some key whole of community resources that promote and sustain wellbeing
  - Local area planning
  - Town centres
  - Public spaces
  - Green space
  - Public transport
  - Community programs

# What is needed

- Local government which considers its role in fostering community wellbeing.
- Robust, holistic, cross portfolio support and intervention responses that are ‘fit for purpose’
- Early holistic support is crucial for disadvantaged children with cognitive disabilities and/or mental health disorders who are homeless or in unstable housing.

# **Proposition 5:**

## **Good practice involves bringing together a number of perspectives and levers**

- Responding to complexity
- Appreciating that a vibrant social and cultural community will do better economically
- Building partnerships- vertical and horizontal
- Linking across response domains



# Steps and seats ...







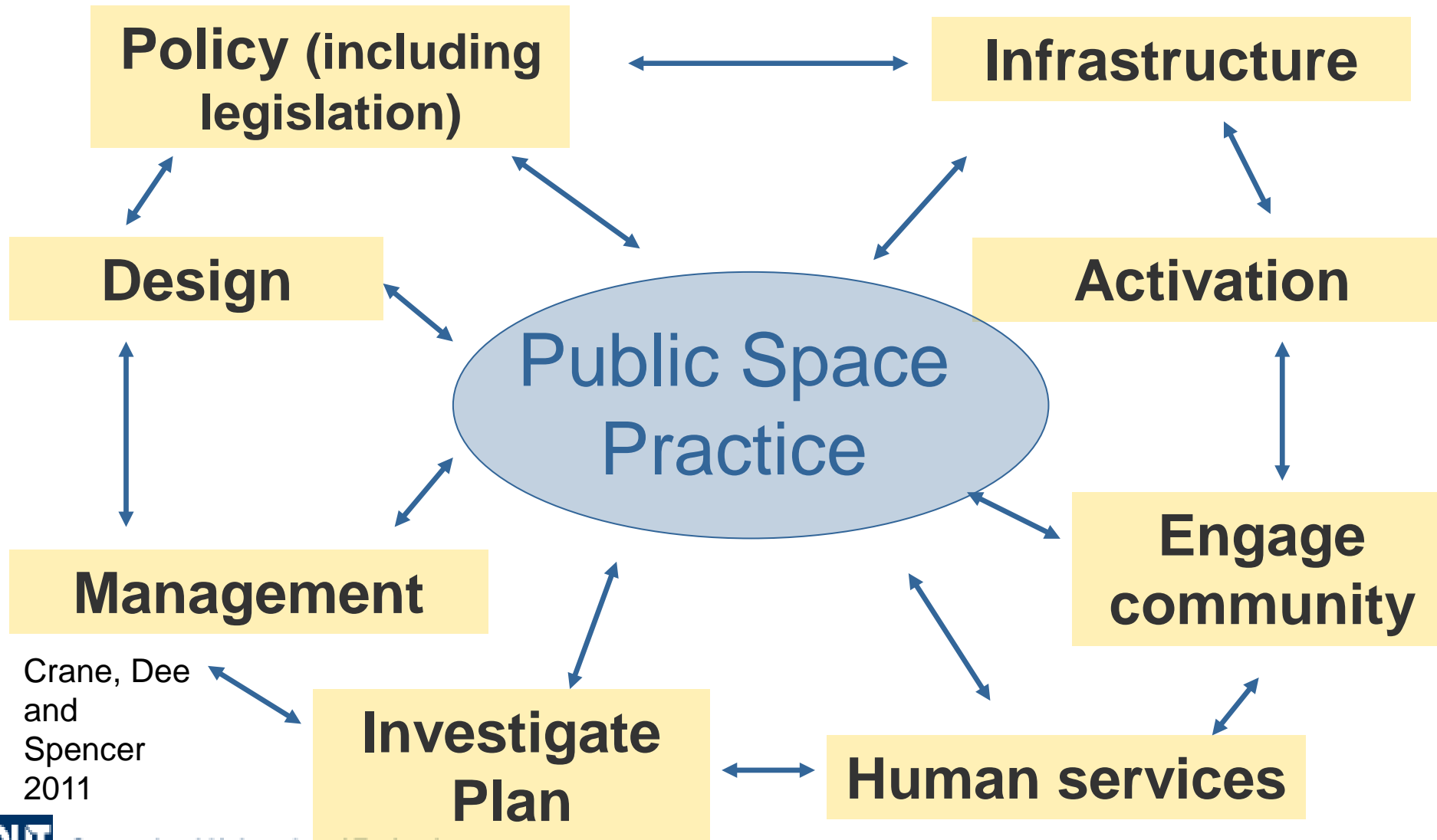
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# A mixed response approach



Crane, Dee  
and  
Spencer  
2011

# A multi-strategy approach in Redlands

(Crane, Dee and Spencer 2011)

- Development of a City '**Strong Communities**' **policy** which recognised a strong community as a *connected community with access to the full range of options required for a rich community life and an active attachment to place*. Provided some legitimacy for an inclusive practice approach to be adopted by Council community development officers.
- Conducted 'Youth and Public Space **Survey**' with high school students. This highlighted a key issue around many young people not feeling the community was concerned about their safety
- Establishment of a Capalaba **Stakeholders Group** by Council to develop responses to perceived tensions
- Development of **guidelines** (protocols) for addressing locality specific and city wide public space tensions using PAR

- Holding of a series of community safety **forums** where findings and the various initiatives were presented to Council and ‘the community’
- Development of a **youth space** in a building owned by Council which included a separately funded engagement and evaluation strategy
- Development of a City **social infrastructure plan**
- Development of **child friendly and community safety policies and guidelines** for the City
- **Master plan development** for the Capalaba CBD area.

# Challenges and opportunities

- Public and community accessed spaces as sites for building wellbeing
  - Early intervention (first to know and engagement sites)
  - Community practice responses to tensions between marginalised people and other interests
  - Crime prevention
  - ‘Community’ events and information
  - Community development
  - Delivery of human services
    - Street outreach
    - Core services eg Centrelink, counselling
  - Workforce development eg training security



## **Proposition 6: Engaging with the community around wellbeing offers an opportunity to to enhance the political process**

- Civic engagement and interaction which is embedded and inclusive promotes the development of social relationships and local capitalism
- Stereotypes and reactive, simplistic accounts are less able to be sustained and can give way to more win-win options emerging (as local ‘emergent knowledge’ is produced)
- This requires the creation of non-commodified (‘third’) spaces that are not dependent on consumption and which allow ‘strangers’ to pause and interact. Such spaces can be cultural, experiential and spatial.

- Voluntary organisations, social programs, community development strategies and community cultural development (CCD) play a vital role in creating such spaces.
- Challenges around valuing the voices, presence and contribution of those who are on the social and economic margins
- ‘The market’ will not be sufficiently responsive to building community wellbeing that includes those who are marginalised.
- The institutions of local governance play a critical role in the development of complementariness between different forms of capital



# Tentative conclusions

- Community wellbeing is a useful destination goal as long as we include everyone in ‘the community’
- We need to use various strategies and levers in complimentary and inter-connected ways
- Participatory community inquiry processes (eg participatory action research- see Crane and O’Regan 2010) are a useful process for producing both evidence and engagement
- Creating a range of ‘spaces’ for pausing, gathering and communicating is critical. **CHANGE HOW WE DO SEATING!** Multiple ‘rooms’ rather than expecting everyone to be together, curved seats to increase conversation ease and sociability, informal seating on other structures built in and permitted
- Police and control oriented to maintaining the inclusive and safe character of such spaces

- Better understand how conflicts are seen from different perspectives including those often seen as ‘problematic’ eg informal conversations, surveys, interviews, focus groups, community development processes
- See social vitality as linked to economic vitality
- See local hot spots as a pathway to broader more comprehensive responses
- Activate spaces and build comfort and relationships through social and community processes and programs that are embedded in community but guided by a wellbeing framework

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# Thankyou

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